

Organic social change

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ABSTRACT

The distinctness of each person's life and experience is an important consideration in dominant accounts of how democratic institutions should distribute basic rights and liberties. Drawing on recent social movements, philosophers like Iris Marion Young, Miranda Fricker, and Axel Honneth have nonetheless drawn attention to the distinctive claims and challenges that plurality and difference entrain in democratic societies by analysing how the dominant discourses on rights and justice tend to elide, obscure, or reify the lived experiences of individuals belonging to disadvantaged and oppressed groups. In this essay, I offer an independent justification for why we should take such lived experiences seriously. I show how the lived experiences of disadvantaged and oppressed individuals can be a resource for deep and meaningful social change. I propose a distinctive kind of social change in which the disadvantaged and oppressed themselves drive the process of transformation whereby they change the oppressive frames of difference relating to their race, class, sex, or ability. I call this kind 'organic social change'. I also show that organic social change is distinctively important in that the disadvantaged and oppressed get to enact an empowering mode of cooperation that harnesses their singularities when they are the ones driving the process of their own and one another's transformations.

KEYWORDS

Cooperation; difference; empowerment; lived experience; Mississippi movement; oppression; singularity; social change

Introduction

The distinctness of each person's life and experience figures as an important consideration for recent accounts of rights and justice as a basis for democratic institutions. In John Rawls's *A theory of justice*, for example, the plurality and distinctness of individual persons are taken seriously in at least two important respects. One, the conception of justice as fairness turns on a conception of society as comprising a plurality of distinct persons, whose separate systems of ends are accorded equal weight in an original agreement rather than being conflated, as in the case of utilitarianism, into the system of desires of an impartial sympathetic spectator. Two, a social system in which the principle of equal liberty and the difference principle operate effects a fair distribution of primary social goods – that is, rights, liberties, and opportunities, and income and wealth – such that each person can reasonably expect enough share of such goods as would allow them to improve their own life prospects (1999, 79–81). Under such a social system, no one is expected to sacrifice their own life prospects for the sake of others, and everyone

develops a sense of their own value from being able to carry out their own rational plan of life.

Among political theorists who draw influence from critical theory, however, this distributive paradigm elides or reifies crucial facets of human life and human experience. Citing one criticism from radical democratic theorists, Iris Marion Young has pointed out that the distributive paradigm ‘implicitly defines human beings as primarily consumers, desirers, and possessors of goods’ (1990, 36). Insofar as human beings are also doers and actors, she then argues, their claims for social justice also enjoin attention on what structural conditions might promote the following experiences and endeavours:

learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings; participating in forming and running institutions, and receiving recognition for such participation; playing and communicating with others, and expressing our experience, feelings and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen. (1990, 37)

It is through such experiences and endeavours that the new left social movements of the 1960s and 1970s came to have an emancipating and empowering import for oppressed groups. Hence, for Young, social justice calls for democratic institutions and processes in which oppressed groups in particular are able to assert a positive sense of difference – that is, one that need not entail exclusion, opposition, or domination but rather simply expresses the hitherto unacknowledged difference or specificity of the life experience, social perspective, and culture of oppressed groups. In lieu of Rawls’s liberal pluralism, she advances a radical democratic pluralism that ‘acknowledges and affirms the political significance of social group difference as a means of ensuring the participation and inclusion of everyone in social and political institutions’ (1990, 168).

A similar commitment to pluralism animates the work of Miranda Fricker. In her own analysis of injustice, Fricker embarks from a pluralism that is ‘capable of honouring the everyday insight that social differences give rise to differences in the perspectives in which the world is viewed, and that power can be an influence in whose perspectives seem rational’ (2000, 160). With this framework, she analyses a kind of injustice that obtains when those who are powerless are unable to fully make sense of their experiences because the collective social understandings favour the experiences of those with power. She calls this ‘hermeneutic injustice’. She then uses this to explain the political significance of the speakouts that marked the early years of the women’s movement: distinctive social experiences whose nature and significance had initially been obscure to the women who experienced them had to be shared in settings where people listened to one another, attending not only to what was said, but also to what they could not yet articulate (2007).

More recently, Axel Honneth observes that insofar as social criticism has focused mainly on whether social arrangements satisfy certain principles of justice, it has ‘lost sight of the fact that a society can demonstrate a moral deficit without violating generally valid principles of justice’ (2008, 84). Here, Honneth is referring specifically to the increasing reification of social relations and social life. Reification refers to how a person’s life comes to be either treated or experienced as thing-like such that it loses both its human and humane character. This phenomenon manifests, for example, in the convenient images in which people typecast, say, those who are black, female, or gay, or in the stance that such typecast individuals end up adopting towards themselves. In his final analysis, Honneth defines reification as a kind of forgetting:

we lose the ability to understand immediately the behavioural expressions of other persons as making claims on us – as demanding that we react in an appropriate way ... [because] we lack, so to speak, the feeling of connection that would be necessary for us to be affected by the expressions we perceive. (2008, 57–8)

These alternative approaches to normative social theory and social criticism point to other crucial respects in which each person's life and experience is distinct from every other – specifically, by virtue of their social group identification (Young), their different perspectives on social experiences (Fricker), or their distinctive claims for recognition (Honneth). That such expressions of difference can be inhibited, distorted, or unrecognised, particularly for those who are black, poor, female, or disabled, is what Young, Fricker, and Honneth foreground in their respective analyses of oppression, hermeneutic injustice, and reification. In alluding specifically to the significance of social movements, these theorists also point out how the experiences of those who are disadvantaged and oppressed can serve as a powerful motivating force and important resource for driving processes of social change whose significance goes beyond merely securing certain rights, liberties, and opportunities.

In line with these approaches, my main thrust in the present essay is to provide a fine-grained account of a particular conception of difference – that is, the singularity of each person's lived experiences – and demonstrate its significance for contemporary social theory. More specifically, I show how the lived experiences of people who are disadvantaged and oppressed can be a resource for deep and creative forms of social change. Out of their own lived experiences, disadvantaged and oppressed people can harness their own powers to think, express the powers of their own feelings, and develop powers to make their own decisions and to act on them. On my account, there is a distinctive kind of social change that comes about through a process whereby the disadvantaged and oppressed drive their own transformation and facilitate a similar transformation in those individuals with whom they interact or cooperate. Crucially, moreover, these transformations are towards new ways of being different, rather than towards simply getting assimilated into mainstream society. I call this kind 'organic social change'.

What orients and sustains the disadvantaged and oppressed throughout the process of organic social change is their deep yearning to change oppressive frames of difference, that is, ways of framing their race, class, sex, or ability that perpetuate their disadvantage and oppression. People who are black, poor, female, or disabled get treated as inferior, lazy, servile, abnormal, or inept, respectively, not by virtue of their actual characteristics, but solely by virtue of their membership in their respective groups. Individuals belonging to these groups therefore get framed as 'different' in ways that impose significant constraints on how they experience their lives.

I have two main aims in this essay. My first aim is to characterise a distinctive form of social change, which I call *organic* social change. The process of organic social change is distinguished both by 'what' it changes (namely, oppressive frames of difference) and by 'how' what changes is changed (namely, by the disadvantaged and oppressed themselves). To accomplish this first aim, I begin in §1 by delineating the features of organic social change and providing a concrete historical example to illustrate these features. In this way, I demonstrate that the category is not empty. To further distinguish organic social change, I next contrast it, in §2, with a different process of social change in which oppressive frames of difference are again what is changed, but *not* by the disadvantaged and oppressed themselves (i.e. the 'how' differs).

My second main aim is to show that organic social change is not only distinctive, but also distinctively valuable and important. I do this in §3, by focusing on the empowering kind of cooperation that the disadvantaged and oppressed get to enact when they are the ones driving the process of their own and one another's transformations. I conclude in §4 and §5 by addressing two objections to my account.

§1 Organic social change

'Organic social change' refers to a process in which people who are disadvantaged and oppressed recast the oppressive frames of difference relating to their race, class, sex, or ability. In organic social change, the disadvantaged and oppressed abide by three intertwining principles: (i) they should harness the powers and possibilities that their own lived experiences and interactions afford;¹ (ii) their commitment to change in their society should be stronger than their feeling for self;² and (iii) in order to change in their society, they should change that society. My discussion will focus on a specific type of organic social change, a subset of its instances, in which the process gets initiated and facilitated by certain individuals, whom I shall call 'facilitators'.

'Frames of difference' refer to prevailing frames of understanding that mark out people who are black, poor, female, or disabled for differential treatment on the basis of commonly held beliefs about how these individuals behave, and about how individuals belonging to privileged social groups generally behave towards them. Individuals who do not belong to privileged social groups are thus framed as 'different' in ways that impose significant constraints on how they experience their lives. Such individuals typically undergo a formative experience in which they must live through what it is like to be disadvantaged and oppressed on account of how their difference gets framed in society. In the midst of such a lived experience, the searing pain that ensues compels such individuals to examine and understand the frame of difference that has triggered it. However, no matter how hard they try to understand, say why 'the negro has never done anything for himself',³ they would not in fact be able to. Inasmuch as their understanding gives out, they come out of this lived experience with a deep yearning to change oppressive frames of difference.

To the extent that reason proves of no avail to their suffering, the individuals who do inhabit and endure such a searing lived experience also awaken to mental and bodily powers more primal than reason. I suggest three primal powers in particular. First is the absolute kind of presence to what they are experiencing that I will simply call *attunement*. They develop this power of attunement from the emotional sensitivity with which their bodies register what they are experiencing, and from the attention with which they direct their minds to what they are experiencing. Such sensitivity and attention notwithstanding, their attempt to understand what they are living through must fail. Surviving that attempt, however, would indicate to them that even as what had drawn their attention and sensitivity proved intractable, it was not the same as what *moved* them to invest that degree of attention and sensitivity in their lived experience. They thereby intuit a second primal power, namely, the strength of their *determination* to understand what they were living through. This determination grounds them in their desire to change oppressive frames of difference, and in the correlative conviction of what is truly important to them. The last power they develop is an attitude of *open and abiding patience* towards themselves, other people, and the world they live in, as evinced by how they rose from

the searing pain they endured more with a sense of quandary combined with yearning than with a thirst for vengeance against a personal injury.

Whereas all human beings have powers of attention, sensitivity, and determination, only a few individuals can express these powers to such a degree as to blossom into the kind of patience I just described in the course of their lived experience of oppression. Hence, among these exceptional individuals, the yearning to change oppressive frames of difference that takes root in formative experiences of oppression would, over time, ripen into distinctive sensibilities conducive to organic social change. I shall refer to these individuals as *facilitators* of organic social change, or simply facilitators.

Insofar as a facilitator abides by the second principle of organic social change (a commitment to change in society that is stronger than her feeling for self), the process by which she recasts oppressive frames of difference necessarily implies more than her own personal transformation. She must find individuals with whom to cooperate who share her yearning to change oppressive frames of difference. Insofar as she and these other individuals abide by the third principle of organic social change, they know that they cannot change in their society unless they change that society. They also understand that to change society, they must initiate a struggle for social change that involves as many people as possible. They must therefore immerse themselves in the communities of people who are also disadvantaged and oppressed. It is in the course of such immersion that facilitators draw people who are disadvantaged and oppressed into organic social change.

To further illustrate the distinguishing features of organic social change, I will now analyse a concrete historical example. In the early 1960s, student organisers belonging to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organised and empowered disadvantaged and oppressed blacks across the state of Mississippi.⁴ As a result of their efforts, close to 60% of black Mississippians registered to vote in 1968 compared to 5% in 1956 (Lichtman 1969, 353). To this day, Mississippi's voter turnouts in presidential elections often vie with those of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Massachusetts in spite of its low levels of income and education relative to the latter states. From the end of Reconstruction until 1962, white Mississippians had framed black people in Mississippi as apathetic, apolitical buffoons. Today, in spite of high voter turnouts among African-Americans across the state, Mississippi remains a red state precisely because white Mississippi now sees black people as active voting citizens.

These developments trace back to a course of events that began in summer of 1962, when a feisty and energetic 23-year old named Sam Block set out to launch a voter registration campaign in Leflore, Mississippi. When he set out to do this, Block had neither conducted such a campaign nor organised a movement in his life. Nor did he know what response from the black community awaited him there. All he knew in fact was the high likelihood of reprisals against any black person who dared to challenge the white power structure.

As soon as Block found a place to stay in Greenwood, the seat of Leflore county, he went straight into canvassing, 'just talking to people in the community about voter education and registration [as a way of] testing the pulse of people' (1986). From those casual conversations, Block learned that many black people in Leflore were either frightened or angry about their social situation. Even so, most of the local people⁵ steered clear of Block in the beginning. Associating him with Freedom Riders who came into town to stir trouble and then left the local people to deal with the reprisals that ensued, they told Block they did not

want to have anything to do with ‘that mess’. This changed after their first mass meeting, when Block taught freedom songs to those who came. People became receptive to Block after that, asking him when they were meeting next so they could learn more freedom songs. He thus began to use freedom songs not only to bring local people together but also to hold them together. In the course of these ventures, a new frame of understanding for what he was doing began to take shape in Block’s mind, namely, a sense for what made people receptive to him, for how to overcome people’s fears, and for how to channel their anger into constructive forms of resistance, for example, registering to vote. Inasmuch as Block listened attentively and patiently to the local people, he learned not only what they had to say, but also what they were yet struggling to express. In a matter of months, he was thus able to identify where the movement would take root, namely among:

older people who were angry, who were looking for some kind of direction, for somebody who could give form and expression to ideas and thoughts that they had had in mind for years, to things that they wanted to do [but] just couldn’t bring together. (Block 1986)

It is to these people that Block would directly transmit the first principle of organic social change, that is, that they should harness the powers and possibilities that their lived experiences afford.

Block got the local people to harness their own lived experiences by exposing them to new or challenging endeavours – for example, performing new activities, operating in new environments, or resisting the demands of their oppressors. The more the local people attended to what they were experiencing in such endeavours, the more they engaged their own powers of thinking, feeling, or acting to make sense of, or respond to, what is unfolding there and then. Similarly, the stronger their determination in undertaking a particular endeavour, the more they drew on their own powers of thinking, feeling, or acting in carrying that endeavour through. In the course of such lived experiences, they developed new frames of understanding for making sense of their own experiences, as well as new attitudes (i.e. needs, desires, emotions, and aspirations).

Block facilitated such a lived experience when he took his first group of twenty people to register at the courthouse. A Sheriff Smitty spat on Block’s face, threatened him with a pistol, and ordered him to pack his bags and leave Greenwood immediately. Then came Block’s reply:

Sheriff, if you don’t want to see me around here the next day, the next hour, the next minute, or the next second, the best thing for you to do is to pack your bags and leave because I am going to be here.

The people who came with him regained their own sense of courage from witnessing that. When highway patrolmen followed them to their homes and took their names and addresses down as a form of intimidation, some of them shouted: ‘You don’t scare me no more. You don’t scare me no more’. They also began ‘to get out into the community themselves and round up people [to] become involved in [the] movement’ (Block 1986).

In this episode, Block got the local people to draw on their own powers of thinking, feeling, and acting to make sense of, and respond to, what unfolded at the courthouse. Witnessing Block’s reply to the sheriff reassured them that Block would not leave them under pressure of threat or out of fear for his own life. They thus developed a new frame of understanding for what Block was doing: the boy they had once suspected of

stirring up another ‘mess’ now affected them as a young brother who was willing to risk his own life so they could become the first-class citizens they aspired to be. They also developed new attitudes. Block’s open display of resistance let them share in the feeling of courage that got him to take a stand against an oppressor. So on being refused their right to vote at the courthouse, their fears gave way to anger and a sense of determination. Steeled by this newfound courage and determination, they went out into their communities to get others involved in the movement.

This process of organic social change developed further over a course of events that began in October 1962, when the Leflore County Board of Supervisors decided to cut off the distribution of commodities (i.e. oatmeal, rice, flour, and sugar). Over 20,000 poor black people in the county depended on those commodities to survive through the winter months. Whereas previous white reprisals had cowed them into fear and resignation, this discontinuation of commodities only made them angry. This time, moreover, Block and other SNCC staff were able to channel the local people’s anger into the movement. On the 24th and 25th of February, 150 black people would go down to the courthouse to register. When Block got arrested on false charges for the seventh time, ‘over a hundred protesting Negroes attended Block’s trial, overflowing city hall and shocking city officials’ (Payne 2007, 2: 162). Even as reprisals from the white community escalated – that is, two shootings per week, and police officers siccing dogs on those who were registering or protesting – the local black people of Leflore could no longer be deterred from their commitment to become first-class citizens, and thus to changing Mississippi. By the end of March, local people had taken over the movement and had begun directing it themselves. On the 27th of March, enraged by violent shootings at movement offices and black people’s homes, over a hundred local people would march to the mayor’s office to demand police protection.

In undertaking such risky and challenging endeavours, disadvantaged and oppressed blacks in Leflore showed that their commitment to become first-class citizens had outweighed their fear and concern for themselves in the face of white retaliation. They had thus begun to abide by the second principle of organic social change – that is, having a commitment to change that is stronger than their feeling for self. Moreover, to the extent that they began to take action against oppression on their own initiative, they were now acting on their own understanding that they could only become first-class citizens by changing Mississippi. They were thus also abiding by the third principle of organic social change. As Mississippians who had once been disadvantaged and oppressed for ‘being niggers’ became skilled organisers, active citizens, and social reformers, their individual transformations developed into the transformation of *a people*. Although such a people remained different from mainstream society, the ways in which they differed no longer conformed to oppressive frames of difference. As they then interacted with people in mainstream society with their new modes of difference, they also compelled mainstream society to change their frames of difference.⁶

52 Conventional social change

There are many different kinds of social change besides organic social change. To exhibit the distinctiveness of organic social change, I shall describe one contrasting kind of social change that is close to it insofar as it also involves changing frames of difference specific to

a particular race, class, sex, and the like, but differs from it insofar as the change is not effected by the disadvantaged and oppressed themselves.⁷ Frames of difference perpetuate as elements of the common pool of beliefs, be they tacit or explicit, about how people in general behave or would behave. This common pool of beliefs informs not only people's expectations of particular disadvantaged and oppressed groups, but also their expectations of one another with regard to these groups. For example, women in the workplace become victims of stereotypes because men in powerful positions can reliably expect their male peers (and even some women) to regard the women concerned in the same way. Similarly, since the 1980s, the expectation had become widely shared that poor people would simply grow dependent on welfare unless they were given incentives to work and become self-reliant. These mutual or broadly shared expectations that draw on a common pool of knowledge about people's behaviour comprise what I call *conventions*. So for convenience, I will call the contrast class we are now considering *conventional social change*.

Conventional social change is generally engineered by political actors and knowledge experts. In the US context, 'political actors' refers to elected or appointed officials who hold executive, legislative, or judicial powers, and the bureaucrats to whom they delegate the responsibility of implementing policy decisions. These political actors rely in turn on the work of knowledge experts – for example, sociologists, economists, policy analysts, or political scientists. These experts are generally held to be in a better position than the disadvantaged and oppressed to examine what structural factors perpetuate disadvantage and oppression (e.g. discriminatory practices, poor quality of schools, lack of affordable housing), and how being affected by such structural factors correlate with belonging to a particular race, class, sex, and the like. Expert studies can then serve as the basis for the policy decisions that political actors make with regard to addressing disadvantage and oppression.

Conventional social change involves two tiers of cooperation: the cooperation among political actors and knowledge experts, and the cooperation expected of individuals belonging to disadvantaged and oppressed groups. The first tier of cooperation is rather limited in its efficacy with regard to changing oppressive frames of difference. When experts form expectations that involve frames of difference, they are generally making suppositions with regard to what is present or past, or giving predictions about some future state of affairs. It was, for example, a (controversial) study by the Centers for Disease Control that first made the supposition linking AIDS to gay men's promiscuous sexual behaviour (Seidman 1988, 190). When liberal poverty experts expected certain groups to become dependent, they were predicting the probable living conditions or life circumstances of specific groups – that is, 'nonwhites, unmarried mothers, and high-school drop-outs' (Bane and Ellwood 1983, 16). Based on such suppositions or predictions, political actors and experts may reach some consensus on the frame of difference they want to change. Such consensus nonetheless prevails only within the confines of white papers and special committee meetings.

In the meetings and decision-making processes of political actors, expectations take on a moral garb. Here, expectations signify either demands for something as society's due, or preconceived ideas and opinions about people's behaviour. Demanding something as society's due involves assumptions about desert and obligation that are grounded in background moral beliefs or attitudes. Expecting the poor to show willingness to work and a sense of personal responsibility, for example, was explicitly premised on the so-called

American values of positive work ethic and self-reliance (O'Connor 2009, 254). Preconceived ideas about people's behaviour are quite often revivals of past prejudices concerning certain disadvantaged and oppressed groups. Howsoever the stereotypes of women in the workplace may vary according to changing cultural codes, they all betray the prejudice that women are not expected to wield power (Eagly 2012). Given the fierce antagonism between America's main political parties, moreover, even if some of these background moral beliefs, moral attitudes, or preconceived ideas serve the needs and interests of disadvantaged and oppressed groups, there will be just as many that do not. In the end, political actors and experts therefore end up passing the burden of conventional social change to the second tier of cooperation – that is, cooperation from disadvantaged and oppressed groups in the implementation of policy decisions.

To ensure such cooperation, experts and political actors form expectations that demand something as society's due. In this scenario, however, social change mainly turns on modifying the behaviour of the disadvantaged and oppressed, by making 'them' more like 'us'. The disadvantaged and oppressed become different from how they had been observed or predicted to behave by living up to the expectations they form and internalise in the course of taking part in the relevant institutions. With the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), for example, 'most states now require recipients to sign some form of personal responsibility plan that emphasizes that welfare receipt is a contract: benefits are provided in return for the recipient's pledge to carry out certain activities' (Loprest et al. 2000, 189). Here, cooperation turns on bringing the disadvantaged and oppressed in accord with some set of beliefs or expectations, say, about how educational attainment, marketable skills, or readiness for jobs translates to favourable life outcomes or ideal life prospects. Unfortunately, despite having cooperated on such terms, the disadvantaged and oppressed could still enjoy only as much of the expected outcome as prevailing market forces, social norms, and moral attitudes would allow. For example, with PRWORA's strict time limit for former recipients to leave the rolls and begin working, the single mothers who were working in 1997, though higher than in past poverty bills, generally landed in low-wage jobs, and only 23% had health insurance through their employer (Loprest et al. 2000, 193).

Hence, to the extent that disadvantaged and oppressed individuals cooperate with one another as part of the process of conventional social change, their cooperation is incidental (see e.g. Stack 1975). This is not an indictment in itself, but merely how the disadvantaged and oppressed have come to see the situation on the basis of their lived experiences with conventional social change. This predicament stands in stark contrast to the empowering nature of cooperation in organic social change, as I presently show.

§3 The distinctive significance of organic social change

What distinguishes organic social change from conventional social change is the direct and active participation of the disadvantaged and oppressed in driving the process by which they transform themselves and one another so as to recast the frames of difference that perpetuate their disadvantage and oppression. This distinctive importance of organic social change arises from the empowering kind of cooperation that the disadvantaged and oppressed get to enact in such a process. By contrast, the kind of cooperation that obtains in conventional social change is premised largely on survival, not on growth. I shall now

show that, in organic social change, the disadvantaged and oppressed do grow insofar as their cooperation also involves empowering one another. I will anchor my illustration of this empowering kind of cooperation to a concrete example, since what I am about to show does not comport with how we normally think about cooperation. I will stick to the example of how the local people of Mississippi recast their second-class citizenship in the 1960s.

In the Mississippi movement, it was Bob Moses who most distinctly embodied and exemplified the principles of organic social change. It was Moses whom Sam Block respected the most among all the people who came through the movement. Block once confessed that he always wanted to pattern himself and his mannerisms after Moses (1986); other SNCC staff expressed similar sentiments. Historical accounts also suggest that Block and other southerners in SNCC did come to exemplify Moses's uncanny ability to empower other people (Louis 1970; Coles 1983; Burner 1994; Payne 2007). So in what follows, I will discuss how Moses empowered the local people in Mississippi just by virtue of how he interacted or cooperated with them. In particular, I will show that, through his mode of cooperation, Moses facilitated lived interactions and endeavours in which disadvantaged and oppressed Mississippians came to embody and enact the principles of organic social change. They did this insofar as they also developed the primal powers I mentioned in §1, namely, attunement, determination, and an attitude of open and abiding patience towards themselves, towards one another, and towards the world they lived in.

As a facilitator, Moses himself embodied the primal powers I have enumerated. His attitude of open and abiding patience is what made his mode of cooperation distinctive. So I will begin with his own account of how he cooperated with local people in Mississippi. In an interview, he says:

Well, one of the things I felt in Mississippi was that, you always had to understate everything because the problem itself was too big. So you couldn't go around projecting what you were going to do about the problem, right. What you had to show people was that you were actually biting off a small piece of the problem and you were actually doing that. (Payne 2006, 2: 175)

Here, Moses reports that he acquiesced not only in the complexity of what they were dealing with, but also in the uncertainty of what he and his co-operators would accomplish by their endeavour. Yet, this acquiescence in what he did not know in fact derives from his open and abiding patience, not only towards himself and his actions, but also towards what his co-operators were bringing to the endeavour. He did not know what they could deliver because the outcome of the endeavour would depend not only on how he responded to the situation, but also on how everyone else did. This shows, on the one hand, how open Moses was to the powers and possibilities local people could bring to bear on challenging situations. On the other hand, insofar as his patience also bid him to simply abide by, or bear witness to, those powers and possibilities, he did not frame their endeavour in terms of his own expectations about what they would accomplish.

Moses's mode of cooperation was partly due to what Ella Baker, whom Moses regarded as his spiritual mentor,⁸ had instilled in him, namely, that one 'cannot lead a struggle that involves masses of people without getting the people to understand what their potentials are, what their strengths are'.⁹ But how does one get people who had lived under

oppression to understand this? Baker herself once posed a variant of this question to herself: how do you get people to participate in the decisions that affect their lives? This was her reply:

I don't have any cut pattern, except that I believe that people, when informed about the things they are concerned with, will find a way to react. Now, whether their reactions are the most desirable at any given stage depends, to a large extent, upon whether the people who are in the controlling seat are open enough to permit people to react according to how they see the situation. In organizing a community, you start with people where they are. (Mueller 1990, 60)

In his cooperative endeavours with the local people of Mississippi, Moses therefore allowed them to react according to how *they* saw the situation. But why must this imply that he began with people where they were, and why does this matter? Moses continues from the remark cited above as follows:

I didn't sit down and think this through but my reaction to the situation was, you don't mislead people by promising what you can't deliver or you can't really know what you can deliver because you're dealing now with people who had heard it all, across the years, and seen it just get progressively [worse]. (Payne 2006, 2: 175)

This suggests that Moses did start from the unique predicament of black people in Mississippi: insofar as he did not presume to be in a privileged position to appraise and address the situations that local people faced, he projected the very uncertainty involved in those situations, albeit such as to enjoin and vindicate their response rather than to indicate their ignorance or powerlessness.

I now want to show how Moses's own mode of cooperation awakened the disadvantaged and oppressed people in Mississippi to a newfound sense of agency, one that enabled them to transform themselves in deep and creative ways. Let us first consider how Moses talked in his lived cooperative endeavours with local people: he felt that he had 'to talk only about what [they] were doing ... and only to talk really in very specific terms' (Payne 2006, 2: 175). By framing their future actions in concrete and specific terms, Moses was essentially getting his co-operators to think of concrete thoughts and bodily movements that they would bring into the endeavour. On the outcome itself, Moses deliberately pleaded silence. Under these conditions, once they were in the midst of an endeavour, they were not thinking of themselves as agents producing some outcome *through* their acts. Rather, they simply took themselves to be producing something with their own thoughts and bodily movements in *direct response* to the situation that was unfolding. Moses therefore got his co-operators to make sense of their actions through their own attunement to the unfolding lived experience.

While fully attuned to the situation, Moses's co-operators were conscious of themselves in whatever powers of thinking, feeling, or acting went into the unfolding endeavour. That is to say, they felt those powers as their own, or as emanating from them. Insofar as the disadvantaged and oppressed in Mississippi had such lived experiences, they thereby came to embody the powers they had become conscious of. They could therefore rely on those powers in dealing with other challenging endeavours. They could also exhibit those powers as an example for others. This transformative experience nonetheless only got them to embody the first principle of organic social change, that is, that they should harness the powers and possibilities their lived experiences afford. If developing and embodying such powers had merely led them to think

highly of themselves, they would fail to also embody and exemplify the second principle, that is, that their commitment to change in society should be stronger than their feeling for self.

Moses's mode of cooperation had to have facilitated capacities other than attunement. Debbie Louis, a civil rights author who had been part of the movement, provides our missing piece in her particularly illuminating account of transformative experiences in the movement. Referring to the kind of transformation that results from lived experience, she writes:

Perhaps it can be viewed as the sudden discovery of one's own individual power [...] or perhaps more simply one's ability to determine [one's] own existence. For the [lived] experience itself came from one's *own* decision to act in a particular way upon one's *own* conception of truth, and accept the consequences of that act. The ensuing discovery, once that decision had been made and irrevocably acted upon, was *that those consequences could be survived*. What this leads to is the recognition of the act, and not the consequence, as the important thing in relation to oneself. It is, in other words, learning that one can do what one *wants* to do. (Louis 1970, 114, emphasis in the original)

What Louis illustrates in this passage is the concept of *determination*. A person has determination when in her actions, she simply takes herself to be doing what she *wants* to do. It is her desire, in other words, that moves and binds her to her acts. Because such a desire suffices for orienting her actions, she can remain committed to what she is doing even if she does not know what would come of it, or even if she had been told that what would come of it was not what she wanted.

Reverting now to the Mississippi example, recall that what the disadvantaged and oppressed people in Mississippi essentially wanted to do was change oppressive frames of difference such as second-class citizenship, being inferior, and the like. Indeed for those who had lived through what it was like to be disadvantaged and oppressed on account of 'being a nigger', their desire to change that frame of difference was not only stronger than their feeling for self, but had also become as immediate as their feeling *of* self. In other words, they did not need prior reasons or motivations to sustain this desire's claim on their decisions and actions. To fold this point back to Louis's account, the desire to change oppressive frames of difference was just the sort of desire that developed into determination, once people recognised the act as the important thing in relation to them. With such determination, they also had no need for reasons to validate that what they had done was important. As a case in point, because they wanted to change their second-class citizenship, they were determined to register to vote even though the vast majority were not actually getting registered.¹⁰

To the extent that Moses's co-operators got to embody determination, they also came to embody the second principle of organic social change: their commitment to change in society prevailed over their feeling for self. Embodying the first two principles of organic social change signified a deep personal transformation. Insofar as the powers they came to embody opened up possibilities for further new or challenging ventures, their personal transformations were also creative. So far, however, all I have shown is how Moses's mode of cooperation enabled deep and creative personal transformations. I still need to show how such transformations translate to deep and creative social change. So the residual question is this: what drew these transformed individuals together to constitute a *transformed people* that also changed society?

I already provided part of the answer in §1, where I laid out the process by which the disadvantaged and oppressed developed new values and ways of life (e.g. first-class citizenship and political participation) that made them a new people. We can also rest assured that people in the movement saw what they were doing as a struggle of one people. So the part that has yet to be answered is what fostered this feeling of solidarity. It would be a mistake to invoke what black people in Mississippi had before the movement. Although that undoubtedly played a role, we still need a kind of solidarity that held together people who were now changed, and were committed to changing further so that they can change society. To arrive at this kind of solidarity, I want to turn to a remark Moses made about his father. When asked what it was that predisposed him to Ella Baker's grassroots approach to social change, Moses would attribute it to his father's influence. His father, Moses says,

has this great capacity to deal with the person that's presented in front of him and sort of see through the various kinds of stereotypes, so he's always dealing with the actual person and then within that also has this capacity to look for and respond to the human qualities of that person, so he is not predisposed to put that person down. (Payne 2006, 2: 185)

Moses also discerned how easy it was for people not only to develop stereotypes, but also to interact with other people on that basis. He noticed a shift in how people related to him when he began to get some press. He says: 'the reaction is they are reading about you and so they begin to react to you based on what they read rather than what you had before. Which is [they're] reacting to [you] based on your interactions' (Payne 2006, 2: 187). In other words, because part of what people would be reacting to in a cooperative endeavour was each one of their co-operators, it was important that Moses's co-operators were dealing with the actual Moses throughout the endeavour.

But why was this important? Moses only said that if people had stopped relating to him solely based on their lived interactions, he could no longer organise those people. So what follows is a philosophical account of why this consideration mattered based on third-party accounts of what Moses was like as a 'leader' in the movement. Because Moses did embody the capacity he saw in his father – that is, of responding to people's human qualities – he was uniquely able to channel this capacity towards empowering his disadvantaged and oppressed co-operators in the unfolding moments of a lived interaction. Moses's co-operators felt his reaction to what they said or did as a *direct and dynamic response* to their own human qualities. When such a response took place precisely at that moment when a co-operator had become conscious or grounded in her powers in the manner discussed above, what it essentially did was convey to that person: *that power is yours*.

Although this is propositionally the same as what they had become conscious of in attending to what they did, the feeling is in fact significantly different for at least two reasons. One, what played out here was no longer one's relation to oneself but rather being regarded by another human being. Two, what Moses awakened in someone to whom he gave such a response was her value as a human being. Now when people describe Moses, the terms 'different', 'unique', 'rare', and 'exceptional' invariably come up. Disadvantaged and oppressed people generally felt valued and respected among their kin, whom they typically considered to be more similar to them than different from them. From people they regarded more as different from them than similar to them, they typically felt demeaned or denigrated. Because they would have regarded Moses as both different

from them and similar to them, either aspect could come up in an interactive or cooperative endeavour. When the aspect of difference prevailed, they lived through the unique experience of feeling valued and empowered. That is to say, they experienced what it was like to cooperate where each member, instead of aiming for a goal that the community or someone else had determined for them, used her or his own lived experiences as a resource for knowing what needed to be done and how to respond to challenging situations.

That very experience would have in turn awakened the local people that their sense of community could only be enriched rather than undermined if each member could freely express her or his own singularity. They would have also learned that they should value each other's differences by responding to each others' human qualities, and that they must therefore struggle to harness this capacity in their lived interactions lest they succumbed to the frames of difference that mediated how people in broader society related to one another. Out of such experience and insights, they would eventually develop the same open and abiding patience towards themselves and other people that Moses embodied and exemplified. With such patience, they could then also enact the empowering mode of cooperation that Moses enacted.

§4 Reply to objection 1

Given the distinctive mode of cooperation I just described, one might object that my account is not consistent. On the one hand, when distinguishing organic social change from conventional social change, I assert that in organic social change the disadvantaged and oppressed themselves drive the process of changing the frames of difference specific to their race, class, sex, and the like. On the other hand, in the mode of cooperation I invoke to illustrate the distinctive value of organic social change, it turns out that facilitators (i.e. outsiders) play an essential role. Had the facilitators not been there to help, the local people would not have been able to transform themselves and one another in the ways required by organic social change. If the facilitators drive the process through which the people recast their second-class citizenship, then, so the objection goes, either what I discuss here is actually a type of conventional social change or else I mischaracterise the distinction between organic social change and conventional social change. Let me address this objection.

Inasmuch as I believe that facilitators do play an essential role in driving organic social change through their cooperative endeavours with the local people, I must concede that the local people do not drive the process of recasting oppressive frames of difference *all by themselves*. However, there are two reasons why the disadvantaged and oppressed themselves still drive this process. One, the local people undergo the deep and creative personal transformations required by organic social change only to the extent that they also play an active role in those endeavours in which facilitators are involved. Two, such deep and creative personal transformations only become the transformation of a people by virtue of how the local people cooperate among themselves or interact with one another, absent any facilitator. I will also show that oppressive frames of difference cannot be recast unless the local people undertake these two roles. By establishing these points, I will have also shown that facilitators do not drive the process of recasting oppressive frames of difference *all by themselves either*. The objection is therefore wide of the

mark, since the salience and necessity of the contribution to organic social change made by the disadvantaged and oppressed themselves remain adequate to distinguish it from conventional social change.

The local people must play an active role even when they cooperate with facilitators because deep and creative personal transformations can only develop from what the local people harness out of *their own* lived experiences. That is to say, such transformations cannot take place unless the local people experience for themselves what it is like to carry out an act or activity that oppressive frames of difference have long led them to believe as not within their rights or capacities. So at minimum, the local people must not only engage their own powers of thinking, feeling, or acting in responding to new or challenging situations, but also realise new possibilities of experience and action.

Moreover, awakening to such powers and possibilities only marks the beginning of their transformation. For that transformation to carry on, the local people must continue to harness those powers and possibilities towards changing oppressive frames of difference. They can do this only to the extent that they sustain, or even increase, their participation in driving organic social change. For such extended and committed participation, they must overcome the forces of habit, the adverse consequences of reprisals from their oppressors, the censure and resistance of their kin, friends, peers, and neighbours, and the complaisance and complacency that set in from confusing favourable outcomes with social change. It is over the course of harnessing their own lived experiences and interactions to overcome these challenges that the local people develop those new ways of thinking and feeling that displace or dissolve oppressive frames of difference. Hence, unless the local people undertake the active roles I just described, they cannot recast oppressive frames of difference.

I will now show how the local people contribute to turning these personal transformations into their transformation *as a people*. Those who have cooperated with facilitators become agents of organic social change to the extent that they enact the facilitators' mode of cooperation when they cooperate with other people in their communities. Through such mode of cooperation, they not only awaken their own people to their powers and possibilities, but also encourage them to harness those powers and possibilities towards transforming themselves, and thus towards taking part in organic social change. Even as local agents carry this mode of cooperation forward into their own communities, however, they must still graft it onto prevailing channels and patterns of social relations. To such extent, whatever new elements they adopt from facilitators do not simply supplant their old way of life, but rather change it from within. Moreover, this change happens at the roots of that way of life, namely, their lived experiences in shared and collective endeavours. Because the facilitators' mode of cooperation is assimilated in this way, it can continue to transform the local people, and thus drive organic social change, even long after facilitators have left their communities. This also explains why the local people must be able to cooperate in such a mode even in those lived endeavours that do not involve facilitators.

What local agents also carry forward from facilitators is the disposition to defer to, and value, the singular lived experience of each and every human being. Through this disposition, they get to harness their own and one another's singularities when they interact or cooperate. When the local people interact and cooperate on these terms, each participant's contribution to the interaction or endeavour becomes a full-fledged decision or action.

Over time, such decisions and actions equip them with a new sense of agency, namely, a sense that they can shape their own lives as well as the future of their communities. The local people also develop a new kind of solidarity – in particular, one that mediates relations among people who not only strive to keep changing so as to embody new modes of difference, but also value one another's singularities or differences.

Ultimately, the local people recast oppressive frames of difference only to the extent that they are also able to compel mainstream society to recast those frames of difference. The local people can do this precisely insofar as they have transformed themselves as a people in the ways I just described. Through the way they interact with one another, and cooperate among themselves, they have not only come to embody and exemplify values and ways of life that no longer conform to oppressive frames of difference; they have also developed a distinctive kind of solidarity that mainstream society must reckon with.

§5 Reply to objection 2

Even granting the foregoing account of how local people can drive deep and creative social change, one might nevertheless object that my contrast between organic social change and conventional social change is too abstract, universal, and dualistic to capture the dynamic of situated social change in different times and places. My examples, while exclusively drawn from the US, have by and large been abstracted from their context. Inasmuch as my analysis lacks sensitivity to the importance of context and the role of history, it fails to adequately account for the role that institutions play in securing sustainable and transformative social change, as in the case of the cooperation between the working class movement and institutions in Nordic welfare states. By the same token, my analysis tends to idealise the ability of local grassroots actors to create significant social change. Given the lack of context, it is unclear what specific dynamic of social change my examples are supposed to demonstrate that might be useful for understanding other concrete historical processes of social change.

Let me begin my reply by situating the Mississippi Movement in its proper historical and institutional context. In the early 1960s, black people in the south had no recourse to major political institutions (i.e. the electoral system, the court system) to bring about significant social change. In Mississippi in particular, white resistance to black political participation was rooted in an ideology of racial difference that cast 'the Negro [... as] congenitally unqualified to exercise the most responsible duty of citizenship'.¹¹ This ideology saw fulfilment not only through the poll taxes and literacy tests mandated by the state constitution, but also through the rampant discriminatory practices of local registrars and the various forms of coercion and violence that local citizens and law enforcement officials, with the support and cooperation of the state's political and economic elites, perpetrated on black Mississippians who sought to register (McMillen 1977).

Meanwhile, federal response to the conditions in Mississippi had been restrained and slow. Even though key federal actors – for example, John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Burke Marshall and other legal officers in the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department – did convey stronger aspirations to end racial discrimination in the south than previous administrations, these aspirations were tempered by a countervailing pair of concerns: (i) that the severity of white resistance to black political participation, especially

in Mississippi, would require massive federal intervention and (ii) that such intervention would pre-empt the due course of local political processes, particularly the process in which local officials become both responsive and accountable to their own constituency, including those with whom they clashed or disagreed (Marshall 1964; Schlesinger 1978; Belknap 1984).

In reply to the objection, I would now like to expound on what the foregoing context illuminates about the Mississippi movement, particularly with regard to the respective role of federal or state institutions and local grassroots actors in driving social change. First, I must clarify that insofar as my contrast between organic social change and conventional social change distinguishes between two sets of actors – that is, those who are disadvantaged and oppressed vis-à-vis those who are not – this contrast refers specifically to *the process in which oppressive frames of difference are changed*. Provided the contrast is viewed in these terms, all that is implied in delineating the disadvantaged and oppressed as the ones driving this process of social change is the following: this process, insofar as a significant part of its impetus and momentum derives from people's lived experience of oppression, must unfold according to a different set of principles than the ones commonly advanced in political theory; in particular, the principles of organic social change foster an instinctive desire for social change that brings and binds people together into deeply transformative contexts of social action and social cooperation – that is, contexts that imbue new meanings and value to the difference they embody and the difference they perceive in others and thus enable them to eventually recast oppressive frames of difference. This is the main dynamic that the concept of organic social change seeks to illuminate. Before I expound on this dynamic, I would like to first clarify the role of institutions in securing social change on this framework.

Insofar as institutions play a crucial role in shaping the context in which people in democratic societies act and cooperate, institutions must also play a crucial role in the process of social change I just described. Institutions can facilitate this process, for example, as would in fact happen with the present example beginning the summer of 1963, when rising protests compelled the Kennedy administration to push for stronger civil rights legislation (Brauer 1977; Andrews and Gaby 2015). Institutions can even initiate it, as in the case of how the Women's Department (*Zhenotdel*) of the Russian Communist Party mobilised and empowered working and peasant women in 1917 to 1930. To the extent that my analysis of organic social change scarcely mentions institutions, this is largely because of three crucial considerations specific to the historical example and period that I analyse: (i) local actors and state institutions vigorously resisted social change; (ii) federal actors and institutions, constrained by historical precedent and political circumstances, remained cautious about having any direct involvement in bringing about decisive change in Mississippi; and (iii) SNCC organisers like Block and Moses neither understood nor framed their endeavours with local people in Mississippi as part of a broader effort to cooperate with federal or local state institutions. Hence, the concept of organic social change neither denies nor occludes the role that institutions play in engendering social change; rather, it merely draws attention to the impetus and momentum for social change that the disadvantaged and oppressed themselves are able to create, particularly insofar as existing institutions and social arrangements remain unresponsive to their need and aspiration to develop meaningful social relations with others and to engage in creative and dynamic forms of social interactions and cooperative endeavours.¹²

To address the concern that I am idealising the 'local', I would now like to substantiate how the Mississippi movement exemplifies what I earlier claimed as the distinctive dynamic involved in the concept of organic social change. The main impetus for the Mississippi movement came, on the one hand, from young southern blacks who, beginning February 1960, gave public expression to their deep yearning to change the attitudes and expectations that attached to their skin colour in a wave of boycotts, sit-in demonstrations, and school desegregation campaigns across the South. On the other hand, on seeing the opportunity for change that this sudden surge in youth activism presented, local black leaders in Mississippi were able to give their own deeply held aspirations a specific form and expression: they wanted to become first-class citizens (Block 1986; Moses and Cobb 2001; Driskell 2006). Driven by this desire, these local leaders had been the ones who proposed voter registration (as opposed to direct action or desegregation campaigns) as the cooperative endeavour around which SNCC organisers like Sam Block and Bob Moses would organise people in the majority black counties of the Mississippi Delta.¹³

The growing numbers of people who then got involved in the movement would then provide significant momentum to the process of social change once they also developed the desire to become first-class citizens. Here, it is worth noting that black people in Mississippi could not have developed this desire simply from doing their part in existing political institutions inasmuch as the experience of registering to vote still entailed humiliation and intimidation. Rather, they came to develop such a desire in the course of interacting and cooperating with SNCC organisers and other people who were involved in the movement. In other words, it made a difference that the local people were interacting with the likes of Block and Moses, rather than only with local registrars or Justice Department lawyers. Had my account been dualistic, I would have simply left this distinction to rest on the supposed difference between oppressed blacks and privileged whites, or as the objection has suggested, between local grassroots actors and agents of political institutions. Instead, in my analysis of organic social change, I have substantiated this difference in terms of the distinctive sensibilities that persons bring to their interactions by virtue of their lived experience of oppression.

So for example, insofar as what moved SNCC organisers to initiate organic social change was a deep yet largely inchoate yearning to change oppressive frames of difference that had taken root in formative experiences of oppression, they were able to inhabit and develop cooperative endeavours with local people that did not have clear predefined goals or expectations. Furthermore, insofar as the likes of Block and Moses have themselves experienced what it was like to be humiliated, threatened, or beaten and how to lean and draw on the basic human powers of thinking, feeling, and acting that such situations could neither crush nor contain, they were more attuned and sensitive to the qualities that are distinctive to the persons with whom they interacted and cooperated. They therefore deferred to the local people with regard to appraising situations or making decisions relevant to their own lives because they recognised the indigenous and creative powers that those people would bring to the situations they faced.

Lastly, because SNCC organisers understood how easily people absorbed and internalised frames of understanding that often abstracted from the singular qualities that each person expressed in ongoing interactions, they not only favoured face-to-face interactions, but also created a rich and dynamic context for action and cooperation in which people could grow. In particular, even as the movement was built on local resources (e.g. churches

as meeting spaces, social networks) that gave people a sense of security and continuity, it was also enriched through spontaneous traditions like mass meetings and freedom songs and through the civic engagement programmes of the Citizenship Schools. Within this context, local people gained meaningful exposure to community activities and political action that centred on voter registration while also imbuing them with new insights and skills to address other problems and challenges facing their communities (Street 2012, 197–8; Gillespie 2014). Such a rich context not only allowed and moved people to express the full depth and complexity of their singular qualities, but also sensitised them to perceive the singular qualities of others.

In this process, it was not an (abstract) sense of shared oppression or common humanity that brought and bound people together but rather desires and aspirations *for social change* whose spirit depended on the movement but whose ultimate substance and significance were left for each person to define and articulate. Once such desires and aspirations for social change had usurped the claims of oppressive frames of difference on how local black people perceived and engaged one another, the attitudes and expectations they eventually formed concerning their own social situation and life prospects depended less on how others expected them to behave than on what they actually managed to understand and accomplish in their own personal and cooperative endeavours. These lived experiences and endeavours thus served as fertile ground from which they then developed and negotiated new terms in which their difference must be perceived. Over time, they were also able to articulate new possibilities for cooperation among themselves and set the terms in which other social actors had to interact and cooperate with them.

Such was the process of social change in which the singularity of a person like Fannie Lou Hamer could emerge. A poor sharecropper who had to drop out of school when she was eight, Hamer had embodied a difference that people feared, pitied, or denigrated. But since her involvement in the movement, she would cut a figure that confounded and disrupted the attitudes and expectations that attached to the categories of poor, black, rural, female, militant. In rebutting charges that she was a Communist, she would affirm that ‘she knew as much about communism as “a horse do about Christmas”’ (Cobb 1992, 244). In sharp contrast to Martin Luther King’s eloquent cosmopolitan address that summoned a vision of America as ‘a nation that cares about justice, that lives in democracy and that inures the rights of the downtrodden’,¹⁴ Hamer’s testimony before the Credentials Committee at the 1964 Democratic National Convention was largely a narration of her own lived experience of oppression. This testimony nonetheless proved deeply transformative for black people in Mississippi: the questions that Hamer put to the committee provoked similar questions for them by the light of their own lived experiences, thus planting seeds, as it were, for their own growth and transformation.

Conclusion

In organic social change, people who are disadvantaged and oppressed recast the frames of difference relating to their race, class, sex, or ability by driving their own and one another’s transformations. Through such transformations, they develop new modes of difference, both as individuals and as a people. As individuals, the disadvantaged and oppressed develop new modes of difference over the course of inhabiting and harnessing their own lived experiences. As a people, they distinguish themselves from other peoples in

how they interact and cooperate with one another. Insofar as what animates their interactions are their direct and dynamic responses to one another's human qualities, their embodied differences shape one another's lives in mutually empowering and nurturing ways. In their cooperative endeavours each co-operator's abilities and contributions count in their full measure because they value and harness one another's differences.

What I just described are the ways in which our remote ancestors must have interacted and cooperated with one another in order to flourish, and not merely survive. What I have illustrated in this essay is an attempt to recover some of that humanity, drawn from testimonies of disadvantaged and oppressed people who spoke from their own lived experiences. So to the extent that we who are more privileged defer to the value they saw in that attempt, we should also examine how we frame difference, why we cannot bring ourselves to change them, and what significance we allot in our social and political life for those differences that people come to embody from the richness and complexity of lived human experience.

Notes

1. This is adapted from Ella Baker's conviction that the disadvantaged and oppressed 'had something within their power that they could use' to understand and address their social situation, and to protect themselves against violence or injustice (Baker 2000, 468).
2. This is adapted from Charles Sherrod's statement about what it takes to change society: 'our commitment to change in this society has got to be stronger than our feeling for self'. Sherrod issued this statement in his closing remarks to the 'Freedom Summer Reviewed' panel conference held in Tougaloo College on 30 October 1979. In a position paper written in November 1964, Sherrod offers a similar remark, suggesting that the struggle must not 'be based on the wisdom of the pinched toe and the empty belly' but rather on 'a description of what we'd die for, what we want, principles of action' (Sherrod 1964). Similar views have been expressed by SNCC leaders Bob Moses and James Forman (see Warren 1965).
3. This statement is adapted from the depiction of black people in the South that Mississippi journalist Dickson (1907) offers as one of the main justifications for white supremacy in a lead article featured in *The Saturday Evening Post*. This particular depiction of black people is also what triggered the searing formative experience of oppression that would eventually move Block (the key figure in the example I will discuss shortly) to get involved in the struggle for social change (1986).
4. To my knowledge, the present example has not been analysed to specifically engage the literature on difference, empowerment, and social cooperation in democratic theory and political philosophy, although the theme of empowerment receives thoughtful discussion in Shor (2004), Ransby (2005), Payne (2007), and Anderson (2010). Moreover, to foreground the voices and lived experiences of the very people involved in social struggles, my discussion and analysis of SNCC's activities in Mississippi draw primarily on oral history interviews of key figures behind the Mississippi movement, particularly Sam Block, Bob Moses, Hollis Watkins, Willie Peacock, Joyce Ladner, and June Johnson (Moses 1983, 1984a, 1984b; Watkins 1985), and from the insightful interviews documented by Warren (1965). Whereas published accounts of the transformative impacts of the Mississippi movement have tended to focus on the Freedom Summer that took place in the summer of 1964, my analysis concentrates on SNCC's activities leading up to the summer of 1963. For more comprehensive studies on SNCC, the classic text is Zinn (2002); Polletta (2002) provides a rich and thorough analysis and Hogan (2007) gives a masterly depiction of the atmosphere and dynamic of the movement.
5. My use of the term 'local people' follows the definition provided by Alan Draper – that is,

those who played public leadership roles in their communities in support of civil rights. Local people encouraged their neighbors to attend civil rights rallies, led people up the

courthouse steps to register to vote, opened their homes to civil rights workers, and headed efforts to desegregate public accommodations. Local people comprised their communities' political vanguard whose behavior and leadership set the example for others to follow. (2016, 274)

6. These assessments of how movement involvement transformed black Mississippians are based primarily on claims made by people who were directly involved in the Mississippi movement (see Warren 1965; Coles 1966; Louis 1970; Feingold et al. 1974). For those who are sceptical of such testimonies, Andrews (2004) offers an objective and thorough assessment of the movement's enduring legacy in Mississippi, particularly with regard to political power, education, and social policies.
7. This contrast falls in line with how the literature on social categories distinguishes between observers, that is, those inured to 'abstracting key elements and simplifying the categories that they use', and actors, that is, those who 'challenge the simplicity of the categories and the inflexibility of their application' (Deaux 2012, 206; 214).
8. In 1978, on the occasion of Ella Baker's 75th birthday, Bob Moses referred to Baker as the 'fundu', Swahili for 'the person in the community who masters a craft with the help of the community and teaches it to other people'. Moses added that this craft gets passed on 'without becoming institutionalized'. See Grant (1998, 211–2).
9. From a speech by Ella Baker entitled 'The Black Woman in the Civil Rights Struggle', delivered at the Institute for the Black World in Atlanta, Georgia in 1969. Reprinted in Grant (1998, 231).
10. 'Of the fifteen hundred blacks applying in Leflore County over the next six months, only fifty would be registered'. *Mississippi Free Press*, April 6, 1963: 3.
11. This appears in a statement from a 1907 speech by former Mississippi Governor James K. Vardaman that the Citizens' Council still deemed fit to reprint in its standard packet of literature in the 1960s, and that SNCC cites as a reflection of the state's stance on voting rights (see pamphlet 'Mississippi: Subversion of the Right to Vote').
12. This process falls in line with the distinctive dynamic of what Johan P. Olsen, in his analysis of modern welfare states, calls 'open structures' – in contrast to hierarchical and specialised structures, open structures coincide with 'a period that invited experimentation with identities, solutions, and allies; and ... generated a demand for symbolic-expressive behavior that representative institutions were unable to meet, or meet in time' (1983, 35).
13. Bearing a letter of introduction from Ella Baker, Bob Moses traveled into the Delta in the summer of 1960 and met a 49-year old World War II veteran named Amzie Moore, who then introduced him to other black leaders in the Delta. Amzie Moore also proposed the idea of voter registration campaigns at a SNCC conference in Atlanta on 14 October 1960 (Moses and Cobb 2001, 42). Only in June 1961, by contrast, would Robert Kennedy argue that 'voter registration would be far more productive than demonstrations' in a meeting with leaders of civil rights organisations. Before that meeting, the Civil Rights Commission had also issued a report demonstrating that voter registration had no discernible effect on the southern caste system (Brauer 1977, 112–6; Schlesinger 1978, 314).
14. From Statement before the Credentials Committee. 22 August 1964. The King Center. Reference: <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/statement-credentials-committee-democratic-national-committee>.

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